



United States Mission to the OSCE

Response to Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Support Team to Afghanistan

As delivered by Political Counselor Casey Christensen
to the Permanent Council, Vienna
December 9, 2010

The United States welcomes Ms. Roberts to the Permanent Council and thanks her for presenting the OSCE/ODIHR Election Support Team Report on Afghanistan's September 18 parliamentary elections.

We congratulate the people of Afghanistan for carrying out the first ever fully Afghan-led parliamentary elections, particularly under such difficult circumstances. Millions of courageous men and women went to the polls and exercised their democratic right to vote, defying Taliban efforts to disrupt the process through violence and intimidation. We sincerely appreciate the hard work of security officials and of the thousands of Afghan and international observers who, sometimes at great personal risk, supported the electoral process and made these elections as well as ODIHR's candid report possible.

Despite some very significant progress, particularly within the Independent Election Commission (IEC) and the Electoral Complaints Commission (ECC), the September 18 elections underscored that a number of serious challenges remain to be addressed in the coming years. There were numerous cases of irregularities and fraud. While the IEC and the ECC dealt effectively with these cases, these violations of the electoral law serve to undermine the democratic process. As such, continued reform is on the agenda of Afghan authorities and the international community.

The United States concurs with the report's finding that sustained, concerted, and broad efforts, as well as a clearly defined and comprehensive electoral reform strategy, are needed to effectively address fundamental challenges. Afghan authorities made a political commitment to establishing such a strategy at the July 2010 Kabul Conference. The next step is the formulation and implementation of this strategy. Afghan leadership and ownership are key, along with clear support from the international community.

The United States is committed to partnering with the Afghan people and their government to develop and implement a long-term strategy for electoral reform. With ODIHR's most recent report and the many useful recommendations provided by ODIHR and domestic and international observers in 2004, 2005, and 2009, there now exists a comprehensive body of recommendations on electoral reform. We note the seven priority areas identified in the report as the most immediately challenging and crucial for this effort. We will study these areas, along with previous recommendations, and work with our Afghan and international partners on next steps. We highly value ODIHR's expertise and look forward to further opportunities to build upon it. We encourage ODIHR to remain involved in helping the Afghan people and government devise and implement the necessary reforms.

We once again thank you, Ms. Roberts. The OSCE's work with the government and people of Afghanistan stands as a testament to the enduring commitment of OSCE participating States, as affirmed by our Heads of State and Government at our summit in Astana, to help Afghanistan on its way toward a secure, prosperous, and democratic future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.